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ABSTRACT

This document, one of a series of British occasional papers on basic education, investigates adult literacy practices in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The texts and their authors are "Building a National Movement: The Caribbean Experience" (Didacus Jules); "Literacy and Empowerment: A Definition for Literacy" (Lalita Ramdas); "Korea's Long March towards a Literate Nation" (Choi Un Shil); "Literacy Practice in the Philippines" (Eileen Belamide); "Literacy and Popular Education: A Latin American Experience (Cesar Picon); and "Mother Tongue Literacy: The Importance of Learning to Read and Write in One's Mother Tongue" (Meshack Matshazi). (CML)

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VIEWPOINTS

A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON BASIC EDUCATION

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BUILDING A NATIONAL MOVEMENT: THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE · Didacus Jules

LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT: A DEFINITION FOR LITERACY · Lalita Ramdas

KOREA'S LONG MARCH TOWARDS A LITERATE NATION · Choi Un Shil

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MOTHER TONGUE LITERACY: THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING TO READ AND WRITE IN ONE'S MOTHER TONGUE · Meshack Matshazi

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VIEWPOINTS
A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS ON BASIC EDUCATION

Introduction

The ninth issue of Viewpoints, in parallel with the previous issues, "Lessons from Abroad – Industrialised Countries", investigates the experience of literacy practice in other parts of the world. Contributions describe the development of literacy work in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. While the context and focus of campaigns in developing countries may be very different from that of an industrialised country like the United Kingdom, there are common issues concerning curriculum, student autonomy and the role of the state in funding and direction. As Professor Paul Fordham noted in his article on third world literacy in Viewpoints 8, an understanding of the experience of literacy work world wide is important in helping educators to gain a clearer view of the "elbow room" in their own local contexts.

The contributions in this issue of Viewpoints are taken from the speeches and papers from the 1987 Toronto Conference of the International Council for Adult Education. We are grateful to the ICAE for their permission to reprint the texts in "Viewpoints".

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Building a National Movement: The Caribbean Experience

DIDACUS JULES

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By the start of the 21st century, the absolute number of illiterates in the world is expected to increase from the present figure of 824 million to nearly one billion, representing over 15 per cent of the world's population. Seen from a Third World perspective, 48 per cent of the underdeveloped world's adult population is illiterate, and in 23 of the poorest nations, over 70 per cent of adults is functionally illiterate.

These statistics dramatize the global nature of the problem of illiteracy and point to the disturbing reality that geographically, illiteracy coincides with the geography of poverty, disease, hunger and other symptoms of underdevelopment. For the Third World, in particular, illiteracy is not simply an unacceptable educational deficit, but also constitutes a demographic, socio-political and cultural problem of great dimension and extreme urgency.

We now know that illiteracy is not solely a characteristic of under-development and that it exists in the industrialised countries. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in the United States reported the following: Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate; about 13 per cent of 17-year-olds can be considered functionally illiterate; and functional illiteracy may be as high as 40 per cent among young people belonging to racial and ethnic minorities. Studies of the situation in Canada reveal that one out of every four adults is functionally illiterate.

It is evident that illiteracy is not an exclusive malaise of underdevelopment, but instead, is a function of unequality and can be found wherever structures of inequality persist. In this sense, the discovery of illiteracy in the countries of the industralised North is, at the same time, a discovery 'that you, too, have your Third World within you,' as Paulo Freire has said.

Definitive statistics on the extent of illiteracy in the Caribbean are difficult to find. However, some recent studies have provided compelling evidence that illiteracy is a growing problem in the region. It had been easy for policy-makers in the English-speaking Caribbean to nurture the illusion that, with its supposedly solid legacy of British education, the region had a relatively high level of literacy. For some time development workers have maintained that the reality is otherwise.

In comparatively recent times, the issue of literacy has become unavoidably established on the region's educational agenda. This is due to the growing international attention to the question, the work of Unesco in the region, and the unique examples of national literacy programs in Jamaica and Grenada.

Regional governments have quietly conducted studies that confirm the seriousness of the problem. For example, Barbados, long considered the most literate of the anglophone islands, now faces the problem of illiteracy among school-leavers. The current estimate is that the number of illiterates in the English-speaking Caribbean stands well over a half-million people, or 24 per cent of the region's adult population.

It is clear that the eradication of illiteracy requires the exercise of a concerted national and political will. The experience of successful literacy programs, as well as lessons from unsuccessful attempts, point to three important conclusions:

- literacy initiatives are essentially a political undertaking with pedagogical implications;
- whether at a national or local level, the process succeeds to the extent that is becomes a social movement involving a broad cross-section of the community in a concerted attempt to redress a socio-educational injustice;
- once literacy becomes a social movement, the struggle against illiteracy creates a new cultural dynamic in which 'the culture of silence' is increasingly eroded by a new capacity for self-expression, and unprecedented demands for the enjoyment of the products of culture.

In the Caribbean, the experience of this will has been demonstrated on only three historic occasions in as many decades: the epic *National Literacy Campaign of Cuba* in the early 1960's, in the establishment of *JAMAL, the Jamaican Literacy Foundation*, and the work of the *Centre for Popular Education* in revolutionary Grenada in the early 1980's.

BUILDING LITERACY AS A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Of these three examples, the Cuban Literacy Campaign stands out for the way in which it demonstrated the capacity of an underdeveloped country to act decisively within a remarkably short period of time to corrrect a historical problem using the latent potential of its own people. Jamaica and Grenada are unique because they represent similar applications of governmental commitment to solving developmental problems with the full participation of the people. The experience of JAMAL and the Centre for Popular Education hold several important lessons for future literacy work in the region.

First of all, in both experiences the eradication of illiteracy was not an isolated educational undertaking. It was the first step in what was to have been an on-going process that sought to establish education as a permanent right from the cradle to the grave.

The struggle against illiteracy was considered to be an integral part of a broader struggle against social inequalities; in other words, the struggle against illiteracy was a vital dimension in the building of a national movement against social inequities. It was a mechanism for the mobilization of the people around a consensual issue towards the strategic goal of national unity. Put simply, 'by working hard together on a common and humanitarian task, we develop a greater appreciation of unity and a deeper understanding of our latent capability to transform our world.'

Much of the success of these initiatives can be linked to the wisdom of this perspective. Too often we see our work in literacy in narrow technical terms, or even from within the limiting confines of conventional social definitions. From this angle, the reduction of an educational deficit cannot simply be reduced to a question of educational method or limited to providing only educational opportunity. It is the challenge of ensuring that the root causes of such inequalities are progressively removed; it is the imperative of making life the focus of educational scrutiny for the adult learner and his/her daily struggles its content.

How are we to realistically interpret the startling discoveries of so many unlettered millions living within the relatively affluent borders of the industrialized West? Is their illiteracy not an indication of their marginalization from the tremendous material benefits and opportunities available in these centres of abundance?

The conduct of literacy work in the context of a process of social transformation poses also the challenge of method. To attempt to make the real life affairs and problems of the adult learner the focus of education is to be faced with the task of understanding, questioning, analysing and reformulating that experience.

The second major lesson to be extracted from the Jamaica and Grenada experience is that the successful conduct of literacy work on a national scale requires the overcoming of the traditional and sectarian divisions which characterise our social relations.

Ask any gathering of rural people in the Caribbean what they consider to be the major constraints of development in their own local context, and inevitably the question of partisan political and denominational religious differences will be among the top. The polarization of sectarian differences becomes more compellingly wasteful when its effects are seen in a small island state.

It has become obvious even to the most dispassionate observer of the Caribbean scene that the ability of small island states to confront their developmental problems is hamstrung by the polarization of the left hand from the right hand. It could perhaps be argued that the problem is magnified by the absence of any long-standing tradition of nationalist sentiment through which a minimal consensus could be effected. In the experience of both Jamaica and Grenada, the eradication of illiteracy was one of those initiatives around which a significant natural consensus was achieved; this consensus further provided the stimulus for more meaningful participation on other related development tasks.

In the Grenada of 1980, it is the work of the literacy campaign more than any other single endeavour that laid the democratic basis for the emergence of the mass organizations of women, young farmers. It was also the literacy campaign around which the multi-class support coalescent part of the challenge of building literacy as a national movement is to seek to incorporate into the fold the broadest possible alliance of social strata, interest groups and representative organizations while maintaining its essentially democratic character.

OTHER CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCES

While I have spent some time outlining the more seminal experiences in literacy at a national level in the Caribbean, and have concentrated on Jamaica and Grenada, there are other experiences and similar lessons which can be examined.

Since the late 1970's there has been a proliferation of well-meaning literacy efforts at a community level. These have played a role in helping to create a more receptive climate for the eradication of illiteracy and have certainly assisted in ensuring that political leaders become 'sensitized' to this need. These initiatives have been buliding from the ground upwards an effective awareness of the value of not only literacy but also of community self-reliant action in response to expressed community needs.

Some of the most outstanding examples of this are found on the island of St. Vincent where the National Teachers Union has played an exemplary role in the organization of a literacy program in the capital city to which adults come from more distant rural communities. The value of program is that, for the Eastern Caribbean, it demonstrates that *the absence of political will does not necessarily imply the lack of a national will.*

Political will facilitates the emergence of collective action, but it is possible to develop such a consensus, battling the political odds, so that in the final analysis policy-makers are forced to respond to popular agendas. This is what building literacy as a national movement is ultimately all about.

This strategy has been one of the more significant lessons of our times, in terms of the development of mass movements. The peace movement, the environmental movement, are all expressions of the enormous possibilities latent in people to make their presence felt beyond the limits imposed by bureaucracy and authority.

Another example from St. Vincent has been a small co-operative community literacy project run by the JEMS group. Literacy and general adult education is being provided on a regular basis by youth and community groups. It combines literacy with co-operative community action on projects directly related to the improvement of living conditions.

The significance of these initiatives are that they have unified themselves in a cohesive national movement called the National Association for Mass Education (NAME). Through advocacy, and by demonstrating the need for literacy, they have succeeded in placing the issue on the national political agenda.

So, unlike the experience of Jamaica and Grenada, in which progressive governments assumed the responsibility, St. Vincent is a Caribbean example in which *community-based* projects have taken the lead, set the pace, and are influencing government policy.

BUILDING NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENTS

As a result of the ongoing debate and discussion on the question of forging a strong movement for the promotion of literacy, the Caribbean Regional Council for Adult Education has taken action. In collaboration with two Canadian development organizations – CUSO and the Canadian Organization for Development through Education – a major proposal has been prepared to establish a regional literacy program.

The intent is to provide support and assistance to community-based literacy initiatives which have been trying to have an impact in their corner of the region. An important element of the program is *advocacy*: the promotion of the need for literacy and the encouragement of an alternative understanding of the traditional causes of illiteracy.

The importance of public sensitization and awareness of the existence, extent and causes of illiteracy, as a basis for changing social perceptions of illiteracy, cannot be overstated. The change in perception and attitude is a starting point for the creation of a new social ambience around which a genuine social movement is established.

We are in the Caribbean welcome the opportunity to be part of this dialogue and look forward to the movement for literacy becoming as decisive an instrument of the popular will as the peace movement and the other people's movements of our time.

Literacy and Empowerment: A Definition for Literacy

LALITA RAMDAS

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Despite many years spent working on education, literacy and development in my own country, it was only quite recently that I became aware that illiteracy was also a problem faced by countries of the highly-developed West. As I reflected on this, many questions came to mind: who are those who remain illiterate in the developed world? What is their role and visibility in the mainstream in these societies? What factors and forces – social, economic and political – prevent people from attaining literacy skills?

These questions need to be asked and answered honestly. Our experience points to a symbiotic relationship between illiteracy and the marginalization of people, be it social, economic or political.

If one has to draw parallels between the experience of developing and developed nations, it is here that they will be found. In both these societies, it is those groups that are in some way outside the main stream, forced into situations of oppression, deprivation – and, therefore without power – that are also silent and illiterate. In this context, literacy as empowerment becomes particularly significant in determining the strategies required to combat illiteracy wherever it is found.

LITERACY, DEVELOPMENT AND POWER

To better understand these links, we need to look into the historical reasons whereby large sections of the world developed into more or less powerful. Responsibility for some of the major development imbalances in the modern world lies with colonialism and the rise of capitalism, along with the industrial revolution in the West.

Large parts of Asia, Africa and South America were ruthlessly exploited by various European powers for their raw materials, cheap labour and accumulation of wealth. Despite independence struggles in the early 20th century, these regions still reel under the cumulative impact of mass poverty, hunger, unemployment and ill health. Literacy has become a predominant feature under these conditions, conditions that also include a concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small elite.

On the other hand, rapid economic development and the spread of industrialization and capitalism in the West provided the impetus to a slightly better distribution of prosperity. This led to improved health and nutrition, increased incentives for learning and, therefore, high levels of literacy. Mastery over the written word and print media was necessary to disseminate information. To ensure production, came the need to create a vast resource of trained and literate manpower, which literally meant *man* because women were mainly excluded.

However, rapid economic growth and industrialization had its own problems. On the one hand, mass poverty and illiteracy were the major concerns of the former colonized developing world. On the other hand, the industrialized nations threw open their doors to any army of eager job seekers because it suited them at that time.

The result was huge problems of alienation and unequal development – even pockets of poverty – the midst of plenty and, inevitably, the problem of illiteracy.

A VIEW FROM BELOW: THE PROMISE AND THE REALITY

Let us put ourselves into the place of either a new immigrant, a member of a linguistic or social minority, women from these groups, or even a member of a native ethnic group, like tribal or native people. What might be some of their fears, their concerns, their questions? Would they read like the following? Perhaps it is minority group migrants, women, native people who might be asking:

- What is our real status, our identity, in this society? How far do our appearance, our language, maybe our colour, act as barriers to acceptance by the dominant group?
- How far is it possible or necessary for us to integrate into the local, alien culture and ways of thinking?
- What about our languages, our cultural forms, our religions, the traditions and cultures of our peoples? Are they respected? Will we be able to preserve and nurture them? Must our children integrate totally into these different ways of life? If they don't, will they find jobs, acceptance?
- Do we truly have a role, a say, in decision-making, be it at the local or national level? Will we be treated and considered as equal citizens? When an economic crisis comes will we be denied jobs?
- Are our women safe? Would it be better to keep them at home and not send them to school, to work?

Admittedly, one is making assumptions about the kind of people who are illiterate, and also about some possible reasons for their remaining so. But it is also true in today's world that large numbers of adults *do not voluntarily choose to remain ignorant or illiterate*. They are saying, in their own languages, that they will opt for the kind of education, literacy, which reflects their own concerns and needs, treats them with dignity and helps them to find solutions to their problems.

Ultimately, these people are expressing their own sense of powerlessness in a milieu which often uses the rhetoric of liberalism, but which behaves in a contrary manner. They are asking for power, but they are not sure about *the language of power*.

In the developing world also, similar questions are being raised, even in somewhat different contexts, that centre on the factors of alienation, exploitation, and urban-rural imbalance.

1. *Alienation* stems from massive migration from rural areas to the cities in search of employment, food and educational opportunity.

2. *Exploitation* continues, of women, the landless, the tribal and scheduled castes (the untouchables), as a direct outcome of economic, social and political powerlessness.

3. *Urban-rural imbalance* applies to everything from health and education to electricity, water and employment. While 80 per cent of people live in rural areas in a largely agricultural economy, 80 per cent of the facilities are concentrated in the

urban areas. The 20 per cent with money and power and education exploit the majority.

THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE: AN EXPERIMENT IN LITERACY

In countries such as India, with an illiteracy rate of over 60 per cent, and a rate of over 80 per cent for women, literacy programs traditionally have played a major role in educational planning. From time to time, the participation of governmental and voluntary agencies has been harnessed in the battle against mass illiteracy. While the overall percentage of literacy has improved slightly in the last 40 years, in absolute terms the problem remains as monumental in its dimensions. We have the dubious distinction of facing the 21st century with over half of the world's illiterates – around 500 million adults.

I would like to share the experiences of literacy work in my own small urban-based organization in New Delhi, whose name, ANKUR, means seedling. The lessons learned after some ten years of working with groups that are socially and economically underprivileged and marginalized – especially women – are relevant for any strategy that needs to be evolved if the fight against illiteracy is to succeed.

In 1977-78, the Government of India planned and launched what was intended to be a major national offensive against mass illiteracy. The target was to make 100 million adults literate, and there was a massive mobilization of both human and material resources.

After nearly ten years of effort, and some limited success in small pockets and a lot of frustration, groups like our have learned some hard lessons and have come to a number of sobering realizations.

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

1. Literacy by itself had no meaning or relevance for those with whom we worked – those who were on the fringes of urban life, dehumanized by the physical and material existence endemic in situations of urban poverty. The experience was similar in rural areas. The evaluation of India's national education program has confirmed these micro-level findings.

2. Literacy inputs were combined with various economic and income generation programs that attempted to teach functional skills. However, with no surety nor guarantee of regular employment, within weeks the initial enrolment figures of 30 learners at a centre would dwindle to less than ten.

3. Women attended our literacy classes only as long as it took them to find work, anything to help augment the family's meagre monthly income. They bluntly told our teachers to go away, or stick to teaching children. Learning how to sign their names or write the alphabet would not help to fill empty bellies.

4. So, we stopped worrying about literacy as an end in itself, or as being central to our work. We began to work together with the people in trying to understand their immediate and daily concerns and difficulties; learning together to analyze the problems and understand the root causes; then planning how we could, together, find answers and, above all, take action.

5. Building community awareness on such issues as sanitation and health, housing rights, coping with evictions, dealing with police harassment – these became central to our work. Because we worked mainly with women, most of our literacy centres began to discuss the problems of women in the family and their status in the community. We worked to enable women to build up local support groups, stage demonstrations against dowry, rape and other social issues.

Just getting women to come out of their homes to meet and take collective decisions became important. Learning about legal rights and about divorce, marriage, inheritance, minimum wages – this was real literacy, and it certainly gave women a sense of power. When, in the course of our work, there was the occasional demand to learn skills of reading and writing and numeracy, this became part of the program. Above all, we are learning that the people themselves must determine their priorities and needs, not the programmers in their ivory towers. Our role must be to facilitate the building of people's organizations.

6. Slowly, many of us have witnessed the awakening of a sense of indignation in the people and an awareness of their rights and their dues. Where they have been able to take courage in their hands, come together and collectively question authority and to demand justice – that has been a measure of success. We have seen how this invites reprisals, threats and often violence, both from the vested interest and by arms of the state. But we can see no alternative to this real process of learning – *literacy for empowerment*.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STRATEGIES

Any crusade for literacy will have to be considered first as a political project and not merely an educational one. As Paulo Freire has said, 'this kind of crusade or campaign is not a pedagogical program with political implications; rather it is a political project with pedagogical implications.' I use 'political' in the sense of emphasizing its positive nature as a force for the common good. Since many people shy away from seeming to be political – even making a virtue of being 'a-political' – I will elaborate on how we understand politics.

The idea has been expressed clearly and succinctly by Father Cardenal, the Jesuit director of the Nicaragua Literacy Crusade.

> *Politics is the science that is concerned about all the people who live in our nation . . . Politics in the true sense is a science completely opposed and antagonistic to the selfish, egocentric attitude which gives rise to exploitation . . . We believe that politics is the art of assuring that all people in this nation progress, that all of us conquer and win our freedom, our liberty, our independence, the peace and the justice necessary so that love can be nourished.*
>
> *We believe that our education is not only political but is based on the political sense that attempts to build a world of justice and community . . . is concerned with transforming the degrading living conditions to which fellow human beings are subjected . . . and is part of the noble quest and struggle of humanity for dignity and justice.*

In a similar way, those of us working as practitioners in the field, have seen and acknowledge that no education is or can be politically neutral. You are either *for* or *against* certain power interests in society, you have a certain vision of what kind of society you want. Therefore, when working with and enabling people to challenge and change unjust laws, unfair relations in the family, exploitative situations at work, we too, were taking a 'political' stand for a certain kind of educational praxis.

Translated into literacy, it means using value-loaded words such as freedom, justice, struggle, exploitation, as opposed to value-free words like 'apple' or 'ball' in the lessons we designed. Therefore, the production and distribution of primers with appropriate contents are central to any such program. Naturally, this often means coming into conflict with the established educational channels of the state.

Clearly, one of the major alienating factors in the learning process is the use of a language other than the mother tongue. By forcing another language as a primary means of transmitting skills of reading and writing, one denies people an important natural power of expression. More research is needed on the selection of the right language and on developing all languages for literacy learning.

Training communicators is vital, such as for alternate methods

of communication, especially folk songs, popular theatre, and other traditional forms that reach out with a greater immediacy and touch an emotional as well as a mental chord in the groups of learners. We have seen how effectively messages can be transmitted through alternate media, not just the written word, as long as the content stimulates the thought process.

In a society that has many languages, cultures, religions and races, it is all too easy to trample upon these delicately balanced sensibilities, or to impose one set of values as the predominate and desirable one. This requires constant debate on the question of separate identities – what one could call 'the politics of culture' – so that greater sensitivity develops among the learners and the instructors.

A relationship of equality, participation and mutual respect is a basic prerequisite for any work in adult education and literacy. This alone could reinforce the democratic processes and further empower people.

JUSTICE AND DIGNITY: A FUNDAMENTAL PREMISE

The collective experiences of many groups and many countries provides enough data to tell us that people are capable of learning and wanting to learn – but they have to be convinced that their place in the economic and political life of a nation is equal to every other citizen. Literacy must empower for organization and resistance and bring about a change in power relationships.

While ideologies and methodologies may differ, a fundamental premise remains: the factor of fairness, justice and dignity. If literacy can enable every women, man and child in every society to hold her or his head high, be fearless and confident . . . that, then, is the real definition of literacy as a most powerful tool for empowerment. We need to empower people to read and write so that they can read and write their world, understand what goes on in the world, and transform that world.

Korea's Long March Towards a Literate Nation

CHOI UN SHIL

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Korea's literacy campaign belongs in the history of successful literacy campaigns for several reasons. Not only has it sustained commitment to the eradication of illiteracy resulted in the present 98 per cent literacy rate, but such an achievement – along with a remarkable economic development – makes Korea one of the few countries to become literate through using the campaign approach without experiencing a revolution. This is in contrast to successful campaigns in countries that have gone through revolutionary change, such as the Soviet Union, Tanzania, Cuba and Nicaragua.

Rather than a short-term and single-effort approach, the Korean campaign took the form of a long-range, stage-by-stage national project that lasted some 15 years. It was born out of the time-honoured respect for a literate culture and the struggle for liberation from Japanese colonialism. Functional literacy, and its newer forms of technological literacy, continues as a moving force for national development and social welfare, and as a commitment to lifelong education.

This paper describes the three phases of the campaign, the preparatory phase in the late 1940s after liberation from Japanese rule; the implementation phase in the 1950s following the Korean War; and the mature, consolidation phase of the 1960-1970 decade. Throughout these phases the illiteracy rate dropped from 26 per cent (3.145 million) in 1953, to 8.3 per cent (1.45 million) in 1958. At present, some 98 per cent of the population aged 12 and over is literate.

THE PREPARATORY PHASE

On 15 August 1945, when Korea was liberated from 36 years of Japanese colonialism, the illiteracy rate was 78 per cent of those age 12 and over – some eight million people. This represents the legacy of Japanese policy to keep Koreans illiterate in order to exploit and rule them. Thus, on its long march to build an independent nation, Korea was confronted, among other things, with the formidable task of eradicating illiteracy. The achievement of complete independence also meant liberation from illiteracy.

After liberation from the Japanese, Korea was governed for three years by the United States Military Government. During these years, and later as a sovereign nation, literate people from all walks of life volunteered to take part in literacy efforts. Since the country was establishing a democratic government, and moving away from the tradition of feudal dynasties, it was essential to have the participation of citizens with skills in literacy and numeracy, as well as learning new democratic skills through civic education.

Because an independent government was not yet established, the non-governmental sector took the initiative in mobilizing the participation of volunteers in the campaign, particularly at the grassroots level. The sources of financial support and of literacy teachers came from the Korean people, not from the U.S. Military Government. The campaign became, in effect, the cultural action of the people themselves in response to the denial of their learning needs during Japanese occupation.

At that time, adult education was really literacy education. During the 1945-48 period, the focus was on basic literacy and on a 'social enlightenment' movement that fostered civic education. The schools for civic education were really schools for illiterate adults and young people. The 'social enlightenment' movement, another aspect of the campaign, was oriented mainly towards political socialization, the training of workers, and the pursuit of knowledge, and stressed patriotism and diligence.

Because there were not many qualified teachers in the school system, literacy teachers were recruited from people who were literate – young and old, women and men – who volunteered to take part as 'popular' teachers. The main source of volunteers were school teachers, college students and local resource people. The work of these teachers was to help illiterate adults become aware of their dignity and of their importance in national development.

The mother tongue, once a forbidden and lost language during Japanese rule, was taught in special evening classes at the civic schools. These classes, of three months' duration, were decisive in spreading literacy in the mother tongue and moving away from the use of Japanese. They were initiated not by the government, but by the non-governmental sector, with qualified teachers to supervise the teaching of the mother tongue.

Within the period of 1946-47, the number of classes doubled to over 30,000; the number of students doubled to 126,340; and the number of teachers increased by five times to 93,167. Within three years, the illiteracy rate dropped from 78 per cent to 40 per cent, due to the people's thirst for education and the work of volunteers. The foundation for literacy education was laid, and the once-lost national language was restored and alive.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

In August 1948, the informal and community-based campaign of the non-governmental sector began to be gradually institutionalized by newly-established independent government into nationwide formal literacy education. The new education law of December 1949 created a new type of civic school designed to integrate and upgrade the earlier sporadic literacy provisions. In addition to basic literacy, the programs included basic science, political socialization and general knowledge.

The law ensured that everyone was entitled to literacy education, as a right and a duty. It states that all illiterates aged 15 and over had a duty to attend classes, and that parents, sponsors and employers had a duty to allow people to attend classes. The duration of the classes was set as at least 200 working days. In rural areas, they were held only during the winter.

On 20 June 1950, the Korean War started. Thousands of classes were suspended, resulting in an upsurge in the number of illiterates. To try to limit this number, the government had to wage a double-edged war – on illiteracy and the invasion by North Korea. With the help of foreign aid, the Ministry of Education was always open for adult classes.

Despite the war, in February, 1953, 42,000 adult classes came back to life, and 840,000 prints and texts were distributed to five million illiterates. It was a courageous act of the government engaged in a full-scale war, to allocate part of its budget to the illiteracy, and to rebuild the vanished civic schools.

The first phase of illiteracy education in 1954 was administered co-operatively by the ministries of education, internal affairs, and defence. Over 84,000 literacy classes were in operation for 2,700

million illiterates aged 19 and over, and 77,700 popular instructors were appointed. This produced 1.972 million people capable of reading and writing the national language. As a result of five successive phases from 1954 to 1958, the rate of illiteracy declined to eight per cent, bringing the number of literates from 10.750 million to 12.570 million.

Because the next phase of the campaign, during the 1960s, had considerable governmental intervention and support, it is important to note the contribution of a volunteer student crusade during the 1950s. Students returned to their villages to teach during summer and winter vacations. High schools and colleges organized and trained special student task forces to work in rural areas as literacy teachers, volunteer labourers, and aides to medical services.

During 1958 alone, over 20,000 students took part in the crusade, representing 13 per cent of college and high school students and 38 per cent of colleges and high schools.

THE MATURE PHASE OF 1960-1970

The National Reconstruction Movement and the Five-Year Economic Development Plans of the late President Park gave priority to eliminating the last vestiges of illiteracy. By now, the literacy rate was close to 90 per cent of those aged 12 and over. The Movement took over responsibility for the campaign and organized every available facility in cities, districts, towns and villages for literacy education so that the poverty-stricken and war-torn society was transformed into a large and vigorous learning society.

The Ministry of Defence took on the task of reducing illiteracy among military personnel by imposing literacy education among illiterate and semi-literate recruits. In a sense, the military barracks were changed into schools.

The duration of literacy education was about five months. Engaged in this work, as part of the reconstruction movement, were school teachers, literate housewives, students, civil servants, military personnel and the police. The content was broadened from basic literacy to mathematics, basic science and political literacy. By 1962, the illiteracy rate was 9.5 per cent, or 1.600 million people. The improved living conditions created by rapid economic development dealt the final blow to the illiteracy that had survived so far.

A NEVER-ENDING CHALLENGE

In reviewing Korea's long march towards literacy, we can identify the following reasons for the success of the campaign: the willingness of the people to participate as learners and as teachers, especially at the grassroots level; national commitment to literacy itself, strong political will, continuity and perseverance.

The guiding principles were participation, the spirit of voluntary services, continuity and commitment.

We are convinced that a successful campaign is possible without going through a revolutionary change. A campaign may be an effective way to forge national identity, national integration and consensus, and be a prime mover for economic development, but a campaign is not, in itself, a necessary condition for, or a product of, a revolution.

In Korea today, every citizen not only has the right, and a duty, to be educated, but takes advantage of that right. The long march to the building of a literate nation might be said to be over, given that the literacy rate is 98 per cent among people aged 12 and over. The campaign for literacy and further education is a never-ending one.

If one defines literacy as the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy, then the campaign may be over. If one applies the broader concept that includes political literacy, cultural literacy, scientific literacy, then perhaps Korea lags behind other industrialized nations.

Especially for Korea to develop into a mature, democratic country, in line with its economic development, even more stress should be placed on the kind of political literacy that fosters the raising of one's consciousness about the principles of a democratic society.

Literacy Practice in the Philippines

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The Philippines is a country of some 56 million people, 75 per cent of whom are below the poverty and live in rural areas. Despite the impoverished condition of most of the people, the country has an official illiteracy rate of 85 per cent. However, this figure does not give a complete picture of the situation.

The 1980 statistics showed some 5.8 million non-literate Filipinos, of whom 4,840,633 lived in rural areas. The figure of 5.8 million could go higher, considering that the 85 per cent literacy rate was pegged at those who finished the basic education equivalent to grades 1 and 2.

Government response to illiteracy has been to dismiss the problem. In 1981, only 1.47 per cent of illiterates were reached by the government's program. Literacy graduates were the smallest percentage (4.8%) of those who took the government's nonformal education program, which stressed technical and skill training for urban life.

The indigenous alphabet of the Filipinos did not survive Spanish and American colonization, except for that of the Hanunoo Mangyan, an ethnic group in the island of Mindor. The first literacy teachers were the Spanish, whose main object was to convert the people to Catholicism. The military conquest by the United States in the 1900s was followed by the Thomasites, the first American teachers, who helped to establish American civil rule by setting up a public education system. Combatting illiteracy as a tool for domestication continued during the post-colonial period. It was during the years of martial law that people's groups and grassroots workers began to develop their own literacy practice.

THE GOVERNMENTAL APPROACH

During the post-colonial period obedience and loyalty to authority was the philosophy of education. Combatting illiteracy was basically a function of the school system. In the 1950s, literacy work went hand-in-hand with counter-insurgency as a government crushed the Huk rebellion in central Luzon.

The government adopted the so-called 'folk school' approach, and mobilized school teachers as literacy teachers during summer vacations. Course content merely incorporated the school's basic education curricula of language, mathematics, civic education and vocational arts. It was an approach that depended on the local officials being able to recruit illiterates. The project died a natural death, but basically the same pattern was used by ensuing government.

A functional literacy guide during the martial law period illustrates this approach. The four-month course of 100-120 hours was divided into three sessions of two hours each. The content was family planning, which included mathematics, and language arts, which dealt with the mastery of syllables and words in certain lead sentences as the basis for learning the Filipino language.

The lead sentences show the underlying philosophy: The Nation and the Philippines (agriculture, work, health); The People (citizens, family, parental responsibility); Education and Family Planning (population versus production, small families, a developed country of surplus rice, employment, housing, hospitals, etc.).

THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL APPROACH

A. The Church and Literacy

The failure of the government to provide basic education – especially to the rural population of poor settlers and indegenious cultural communities – created a vacuum which, in some places, was filled by missionaries. Generally, they responsed to illiteracy by setting up their own schools in the towns or in interior villages, or by pressuring the government to set up schools. Students were sent to study as teachers or para-teachers who then became school teacher and/or teachers of literacy.

An example is the Mangyan Catholic Mission of Mindoro which has been combatting illiteracy through formal and non-formal educational means. Father Postma, a Catholic missionary, initially persuaded the Mangyan, who live in the mountains, to send their children to the town to attend school. An accident in which some children drowned, and discrimination against Mangyan children by the lowlanders, made the parents reluctant to send their children to school. Since very few schools existed in the mountain region, the rate of illiteracy increased among the Mangyan.

The Mission then set up its own schools in the mountains to provide basic education, and encouraged teachers to teach both the Mangyan and Filipino alphabets, thereby preserving Mangyan. The use of its alphabet made it easier to convert the Mangyan, who were animists, to Catholicism. A Protestant missionary group adopted the same approach and established a Bible school. The result was the separation of the Mangyan into Catholics and Protestants. A dependency mentality developed when some missionaries tried to cope with high dropout rates during the peak farming period by giving rations of food. Whilst this handout of food was successful in keeping the Mangyan at school, it reinforced the patron-client relationship.

B. A Multi-Agency Approach to Literacy

In 1982, several agencies started to work together in a literacy project for the Hanunoo Mangyan. The participating institutions are the De La Salle University Research Centre, the University of the Philippines at Los Banos, the Provincial Government of Oriental Mindoro, the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Philippine Association for Intercultural Development, and the Ford Foundation. The literacy project was initially to take a non-formal approach, but evolved into a formal education project to set up a culturally appropriate elementary school.

The school has the following objectives: (1) to produce a curriculum based on the felt needs of the people; (2) to improve their ability to meet their need for literacy, as well as for food production, health and nutrition, ecology, and understanding of the outside world; (3) to redirect Mindoro's education towards regional needs and production; (4) to achieve self-sufficiency for the schools; and (5) to train Mangyan teachers and para-teachers.

To implement these objectives, the De La Salle University undertook the education and management component and the

University of the Philippines undertook to develop the agricultural component of the project. Four members of an indigenous group were hired as teachers. At present, two former students are being trained as para-teachers and will be employed as training assistants and, later, as full-time teachers.

As of 1986, the school has had a total enrolment of 284 since it started in 1983. The project has initiated the development of a school-based approach which takes into consideration the cultural characteristics of the people. This is a forward step in evolving an approach to literacy for indigenous communities. However, although intended to be participatory, the process is still to a literacy program developed *for* the Mangyan rather than *with* and *by* the Mangyan.

C. Literacy and Empowerment of Indigenous Peoples

A literacy program to combat Mangyan illiteracy is now being evolved by indigenous local organization of Mangyan, supported by the program staff of the Institute for the Development of Educational and Ecological Alternatives (IDEAS). The intent is to locate the literacy program within the overall objective of the Mangyan to be a self-determining indigenous ethnic community in Philippine society. Self-determination is linked to land rights and recognition of the laws and culture of the Mangyan.

Historically, the Mangyan response to discrimination by the lowlanders and to exploitation and oppression has been to withdraw into the interior of their region. However, the diminishing opportunities for land are forcing them to break their 'culture of silence' and to struggle for their rights, taking their lead from other indigenous groups such as the Cordillera Peoples who successfully resisted the Chico Dam project. The Mangyan have set up their own inter-tribal organization, a loose federation of some 16 local organisations. The objective is to work for Mangyan self-determination and uphold Mangyan rights and the welfare of the people.

A number of Mangyan local organizations requested IDEAS to equip them with the organizational and technical skills to work for their long-term and immediate needs. The latter includes sufficient food, health and education. For this, IDEAs evolved a multi-strategy approach which combines (1) a program for training trainers; (2) organization and education that is community-based; (3) curriculum developed based on community and (4) support for active socio-economic and health projects.

Trainees are recruited by the Mangyan organizations for a two-year intensive course for trainers in community education, ecological agriculture and primary health care. At the same time, the training staff of IDEAS conduct workshops in community mass education and leadership. Taking part in these workshops are literates, semi-literates and illiterates, in either or both Filipino and Mangyan. This mixture of people has forced the staff to be creative in their teaching and to rely heavily on oral and visual methods.

It was when the Mangyan leaders became aware of the linguistic problem that they saw the need for their own involvement in literacy work. This would enable them to deal with the lowlanders on a better bargaining and more equitable position for asserting their land rights, pressuring the government to delivery services, or negotiating for better prices for their produce.

The target for the next three years is the development of literacy modules through a participatory curriculum development project that will involve providing basic research techniques for the Mangyan trainees who will also be trained as animateurs. The task of developing an alternative educational approach is a joint effort of indigenous organization and IDEAS. It seeks to develop an educational program that serves the interests and aspirations of indigenous peoples, and takes its cue from the ideas and work of Paulo Freire. Thus, this alternative education approach should be participatory, evocative, dialogical and liberatory.

Literacy and Popular Education: A Latin American Experience

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My interest in the themes presented by colleagues from the industrialied countries has caused me, in the spirit of popular education to try and share some reflections that may be closer to your worries and hopes, in the light of experiences in Latin America.

For several years our countries have been working on a Major Project in Education, sponsored by Unesco. The second goal of the project is to eradicate illiteracy before the year 2000. At present we have about 45 million illiterates. While most countries are making efforts, the way in which literacy programs are functioning means that the goal is not going to be reached, even by 40 per cent.

Why is this? Latin American countries are living in very difficult times. Poverty, the impact of economic and financial crises, the chronic political instability in many countries, the fragile nature of the new openings and reopenings of democratic situations, and other factors, are not creating favourable conditions for intensive work in literacy action.

A gap exists between the social and political, on the one hand, and the pedagogical, on the other. However, our experience shows the possibility for these two to get a little closer if action for literacy is conceived and carried out from the starting point of our reality, which means having a clearer idea of the totality as a problem and as a solution.

Illiteracy is a structural problem, and literacy is but one element of all the elements that should be part of global situations. Latin American countries could achieve – or not – the second goal of the Unesco project in direct proportion to how the national effort includes the participation of the various movements and organizations, mainly the non-governmental organizations devoted to culture and educational affairs.

Working locally with a wide and total perspective is one principle of action which I would like to share.

POPULAR EDUCATION MOVEMENT

First, I should explain how certain terms are used in Latin America, such as adult education, popular education, and non-governmental organizations, so that you can understand what we mean by alternative educational projects and alternative relationships that affect what is broadly called 'popular literacy'.

In the conventional view, adult education has been the same at literacy and primary school programs run by departments or ministries of education. Today, other ministries, universities, institutions and municipalities are also seen as agencies of an ever-broadening set of adult education activities. Alternative educational projects with different, often opposing, political ideas, are producing far greater changes in adult education than the changes produced by and within the state.

One such project is the emerging popular education movement. The NGOs and grassroots organizations in this movement have made important advances in educational and cultural development that may contribute to the opening of an essential dialogue between those active in popular education and the official adult education agencies in democratic countries.

The development of this dialogue requires a new way of looking at, and systematizing, the experience in adult education and popular education.

This experience is not uniform. In Argentina and Paraguay, for example, recent democratization has allowed the creation overnight of a popular education movement. In Brazil, democratization has further fragmented a myriad of NGOs and popular education movements that grew up in resistance to dictatorship. Peru has a national association of 300 NGOs seeking ways to build on two decades of popular organizations. In Nicaragua, a unified popular education program works with people's organizations that respond to diverse regional conditions.

In spite of these differences, there are some common essential elements.

One is the systematic and interdisciplinary development of issues drawn from the actual working and living conditions of the people. Another is the training of teams for popular and grassroots organizations. A third is popular education's direct link with and support of popular communication and culture, in opposition to the mystification that results from ideological domination.

Essentially, popular education maintains a creative and critical attitude towards the dominant social structures so that individuals can recover their ability to redefine their own relationships to the social order. In this way, popular education helps to create an alternative 'social project'.

To the extent that popular movements and progressive intellectuals continue to widen the educational 'open space' within society, more countries will awaken from their indifference and silence towards popular education. In many countries an enlightened debate has started about the roles of the state and of the civil society in education, particularly in adult education.

The idea is emerging that a sense of social justice must characterize the educational efforts of the state, and that the state should provide technical and financial support for popular education movements and for NGOs that sustain popular education.

A DIFFERENT VIEW OF EDUCATION

Society is a totality in which various types of interests come together that are not necessarily favourable to the process of changes of the kind that benefit popular education. For this reason, it is necessary to identify two great forces within society: popular education and non-governmental 'intermediate' organizations.

The member associations of the Latin American Council of Adult Education, the leading organization in non-governmental education in the region, make the following distinctions between popular and non-governmental organizations.

Popular organizations fight for and defend specific demands of certain sectors of the population (farm labourers, workers, the unemployed, women, youth) that make up the popular movement.

Non-governmental organizations are 'intermediate' institutions

(scientific societies, research, cultural and development agencies) which, in their respective fields, assist the basic interests of the popular movements.

The NGOs work with the popular organizations to identify, study and analyse the needs and interests of the popular sector and of individuals involved in adult education. Through educational projects and the training of local people, they strengthen the capacity of popular organizations to negotiate with and pressure the state and other power groups in society.

In a presentation of the national literacy campaign in England and Wales, Alan Wells said that the politics of literacy have to be established within the general strategy of national development, and that literacy has to become a transforming experience for individuals and for society. These statements made me think about my own region, and I would like to share that thinking with you.

Popular education in Latin America is contributing to a different way to view the world of education. To build this new paradigm means to build alternative models for educational develoment NGOs that work with population are helping to develop educational paradigm that is distinctive working style organized by the following:

- A vision of education as per specific social changes that are generated by people who see their role as creators of historic culture;
- a strategy in which research, planning, organization, training and evaluation are integral in a dynamic horizontal dialogue between the people and the porters;
- a priority of service towards those who suffer greater poverty and exclusion, and a vision in global educational development for all age groups;
- an attempt to transfer knowledge skills, techniques and tools to the popular sector;
- preferential attention to national people, farmers, women, unemployed youth, refugees, and organized marginal urban dwellings who are neglected by the official education system;
- an understanding that a special context of 'timeliness' is essential to the definition of educational projects;
- a vision of literacy and basic education as relevant to the everyday work and lives of people, and integrated with human rights, communication, health, women's rights, popular culture, etc.

SOME COMMON ISSUES

At one time, popular education in Latin America tended to overemphasize the political dimension, with the result that the contents of literacy materials were almost exclusively devoted to partisan political affairs.

The new direction is to arrive at a balanced development of the different dimensions, taking into account the needs of survival, organization, and self-reliance of the popular sectors in these difficult times. This new approach, however, still clearly affirms the essential political dimension of literacy.

We can say that the educational option could be oriented to one of the following purposes: to maintain the status quo of the national order; to reform the national order; and to transform the national order. Literacy, and other forms of adult education, must take up the option that relates to reality – at the local, regional and national levels. That's why literacy has a crucial political dimension.

Some NGOs have tended to place too strong an emphasis on the conceptual dimensions. The approach now is to systematize – analytically and critically – the relevant experiences of popular education so as to arrive at a balance of theoretical, strategical and methodological rationality.

I agree with others that the definition determines the orientation and scope of the policies and strategies. I would add that, in our vision, a definition must include the particular characteristic of the *ideology behind the literacy action.* In this view, the ideological options define the decisions – political, strategical and methodological.

Another issue is that of partnerships between NGOs and popular organizations.

At first NGOs in Latin America worked with popular organizations to understand how to contribute to their self-reliance, through a strategy based on the transference of knowledge and skills. On the basis of practice, and research which I am doing with some colleagues, we find that the impact of some NGO work is very limited. It seems to be paternalistic, even though well-intentioned.

At present, the tendency is to operationalize the idea that the key role of the NGO is to promote and support self-education, that is, the self-reliance of popular organisations in their educational and cultural work. There are two main strategies: (1) to work closely with the leaders of popular organizations; and (2) to contribute in forming cadres of intellectuals, technicians and promoters of popular organizations.

The other aspect of the partnership is the complex and difficult relationship between the state and the NGOs, due to historical reasons.

It is important to understand that some NGOs in the vanguard are making contacts with the state on the basis of a critical dialogue. They are getting money for specific projects without being manipulated or subject to political or administrative interference. It is a kind of cautious co-operation in which both parties are playing different strategies and tactics.

I would say that the literacy methods used by the state focus on instruction, while the NGOs tend to use methods that focus on learning.

The important aspect here is to base the contents of the learning situation on the daily lives of the learners. The life of the popular organization itself, for example, is a good instrument for learning. The question of how various groups learn, such as peasants, people in urban-marginal areas, indigenous people, refugees, etc., is taking its place on the agenda of the Latin American Council for Adult Education.

As for educational materials, in most Latin American countries the state's materials are the same for groups all over the country. The administration has a nice speech about diversification according to various conditions, but in practice, any diversified responses are only beginning to emerge.

Some NGOs are moving in creative and innovative ways. One example is the practice of developing materials in association with new literates so that the contents are the product of how the popular sector reads its own reality, the national reality, and the international reality.

POPULAR LITERACY

Poular literacy in Latin America is seen as a specific expression of popular education. At the same time it is considered as a right, as an instrument of overall development for social transformation, and as a tool to strengthen popular education as a whole.

In our experience, NGOs are building simpler and more efficient models and organizational structures. They are combining formal and non-formal approaches, and also working towards decentralization, which implies, fundamentally, the decentralization of power and resources.

More and more, NGOs see that literacy has its own rich and organic life. They also see that, since literacy is one part of the global response, it needs to be connected to a more and greater educational and cultural horizon. This explains the tendency to

emphasize popular basic education, in which context the first priority goes to popular literacy.

CO-OPERATING FOR LITERACY

I conclude with two remarks.

1. In the name of the Latin American Council of Adult Education, I propose that we build together a mechanism for co-operation in popular literacy between the industralized countries and the countries of Latin America.

2. I wish to emphasise the relevance and significance of non-governmental organizations in the struggle against illiteracy and in the process of supporting and facilitating the emergency of truly global educational projects among the women and men of the popular social sectors.

Mother Tongue Literacy: The Importance of Learning to Read and Write in One's Mother Tongue

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INTRODUCTION

This short paper attempts to discuss the importance of learning to read and write in one's mother tongue. The topic is examined against a broad discussion of the problem of illiteracy, particularly in the developing, Third World countries. While it is true that some assertions could be generalized to the rest of the developing part of the world, the main focus is on African countries, in which an appreciable portion of the writer's experience is embedded.

ILLITERACY: The Master Concept

In its Sponsors' Handbook, the Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe defined an illiterate "as a person who cannot read and write in his own language and cannot do simple arithmetic and read the time from a clock face".[1] A semi-literate is explained "as a person who can read and write in his own language but has a limited vocabulary and can only read with ease material specifically written for him: he has the rudiments of arithmetic and time-telling.".[2] Indeed, while in some countries, a person able to read the alphabet is considered literate, in others, the person must be able to decipher a text of a given length. In other words, in countries having a high educational level and an advanced technology, the requirements are greater.

These different interpretations of the same word have tended to create problems for bodies like UNESCO whenever these have attempted to draw up worldwide statistics on illiteracy. Thus, as early as 1958, UNESCO submitted to its Member States a recommendation concerning the international standardization of educational statistics in which the illiterate was defined as one

> *who cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life.*[3]

More or less the same definition was given in a publication of the Statistical Office of the United Nations. This ran as follows:

> *Hence, a person capable of reading and writing only figures and his own name should be considered illiterate, as should a person who can read but not write, and one who can read and write only a ritual phrase which has been memorized.*[4]

It, however, becomes clear that a comprehensive definition of an illiterate is illusive and, as such, it is very difficult to settle for one that would be fully supported by all and sundry. Nevertheless it was no other international organisation but UNESCO that, in 1978, adopted, in its revised recommendation concerning the international standardization of educational statistics, a definition that moved our general understanding of the illiteracy concept, closer to universal acceptance. Thus, in this recommendation, UNESCO defined an illiterate as

> *a person who is functionally illiterate, who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development.*[4]

Indeed, if we accept the above definition, illiteracy is undoubtedly both a cause and a consequence of poverty and underdevelopment. And since it is estimated that 98 per cent of the world's illiterates live in developing countries,[5] it is no wonder that these countries are, developmentwise, going from bad to worse, over the years. Even then, it is important to stress the point that this is happening despite the fact that the education budgets of most if not all developing countries continue to rise, and all possible measures are being taken to try to provide schooling for all, with the result that the rate of illiteracy throughout the world, is, in percentage terms, declining.

THE PERSISTENCE OF ILLITERACY

While it may, however, be true that the rate of illiteracy throughout the world it, percentagewise, declining, nevertheless the problem is far from being solved. For if we consider not the the percentages but the absolute numbers of illiterates aged 15 and upwards,[6] it will be noted that whereas in 1970 the illiteracy figures estimated by UNESCO throughout the world was 760 million representing 32.9 per cent of the world's population, by 1980 this figure had risen to 824 million.[7] Thus, pushing their estimation further, UNESCO observed that if the present trends continue, the figure will be 882 million in 1990, and perhaps as much as a billion in the year 2000.[8]

However, while the argument is clearly sustainable, it certainly weakens when attention is focussed on percentages. A look at percentages reveals an irreversible trend resulting from the international community's resolve to fight against illiteracy, particularly on the two most important fronts; the extension of children's education and the expansion of adult literacy programmes and campaigns.

Evidently the efforts of these two fronts are continually being thwarted by the population explosion which, in many countries, affects and even endangers formal schooling and the campaigns against illiteracy. Thus while the Karachi, Addis Ababa and Santiago plans (1960-62) emphasized universal education as the key instrument for nipping illiteracy in the bud,[9] the extension of school education in many developing countries comes up against obstacles which seem insurmountable. These, recognizing the interpendency between illiteracy, developmental and demographic contexts, include shortage of human, material and financial resources. Hence the developing countries' inabilities to improve, among other things, their socio-economic and technogical performances.

For instance, according to the 1985 UNESCO statistics, the vast majority, 666 million or three quarters of the estimated 98 per cent cited above, live in Asia, particularly in the countries of the Indian Sub-continent and China.[10] But the African continent remains the region with the highest rate of illiteracy estimated, in 1985, at 54 per cent or more than half the population, while the Asian and Latin American and Caribbean regions are estimated at 36.3 and 17.3 per cent respectively.[11] It should, however, be noted that these figures do not include those tht are, in developing countries, defined as semi-literate who, in the context of industrialized countries constitute large numbers of what are termed "functional illiterates", since they possess limited abilities to read, write and handle numbers. As such, the functional

illiterates of the industrialized countries cannot participate effectively in the economic, social and cultural life of their societies and yet, on the other hand, persons of the same literacy level do, in developing countries, enjoy a much higher level of participation in the affairs of their respective communities.

Indeed, while it is heartening to note that UNESCO has made the struggle against world illiteracy one of its priorities, one tends to be somewhat disturbed by the realization that, in terms of figures and target populations, the gap between the industrialized and developing countries is ever widening. This is despite the fact that developing countries have, with vigour and enthusiasm, made all efforts to translate into action their laudable educational plans. What, then, is the problem?

THE PROBLEM

Against this general background in which a few reasons for optimism illuminate a generally discouraging picture of the illiteracy situation in the world, one can identify a number of problems that account for this situation of illiteracy in developing countries in general, and Africa in particular.

(i) Whereas, among other things, industrialized countries have been endowed for generations past with systems of free and compulsory public education, developing countries in general, and those of Africa in particular, have just emerged from a long period of colonial domination, during which time the emphasis was on literacy in the "magic language" – the language of the colonial master. Clearly being literate largely meant being able to speak, read and write the colonizing power's language. Hence the difference in target populations.

(ii) Educational provision, even when the fact that missionaries did introduce literacy in some major local languages is taken into account, was extremely limited to a small section of each country's population, particularly that section which accepted the Christian faith.

(iii) Africa is the continent where the greatest diversity of tongues is found. This fact notwithstanding, the colonizing powers determined the frontiers of their African colonies without any regard for the way populations were distributed. Hence in Africa, territorial and ethnic boundaries coincide even less than in most other regions. Not only are there a number of different languages spoken in almost every African nation, but often the same language, with local variations, occurs in several neighbouring States. If it is written at all, it is likely to be written in more than one way.[12] For example, Bemba is widely spoken in Zambia and Zaire, Lozi in Zambia and Namibia, Zambia was formerly under British colonial rule, while Zaire and Namibia were under Belgium and German administrations respectively. This, as Mary Burnett points out, is true of Hausa which is widely spoken in Nigeria and Niger, which were formerly under British and French colonial administrations respectively.[13] Consequently Hausa, as is the case with other languages so placed, is now written in two ways – one based on French phonetics, and the other on English, with the result that people who have learned one system cannot easily read the other.[14]

(iv) The task of developing alphabets for all languages and dialects in any given country was, for the missionaries and other literacy pioneers, an immense undertaking, as it still is with present African governments, in terms of both economic and linguistic considerations. In fact even where a written transcription of a language exists, the language itself in spoken by so few people within the independent State that it becomes economically unviable for the government concerned to embark upon an exercise that would cater to the needs of the minority group in need. This is partially true of such languages as Venda and Kalanga which are minority languages in Zimbabwe, but well developed and transcripted in South Africa and Botswana respectively.

What seems to emerge from the assessment of this short catalogue of problems is that "Language" plays a crucial role in the ABC of literacy. This appears to be so because language is the principal element in and an integral part of a person's or a people's personality and culture.

> *Every tongue, whether it be "primitive" or "civilized", appropriately expresses the culture from which it arose and that of the people or peoples who use it. Each of them constitutes the most convenient and the surest instrument – and perhaps the only one – that can be used for learning about and properly understanding foreign cultures and languages.*[15]

THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN LITERACY

Learning to talk in your mother tongue is, itself, an arduous task. Learning to read and write in your mother tongue still a much more arduous task. But learning to read and write in a language other than yours is but the most taxing experience that requires an exceeding capacity for endurance. The latter is an experience better known by, among others, former colonial peoples of the continent of Africa whose attainment of literacy in French, English, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and German were nothing but herculean tasks. The difficulty lay in the fact that the learners were being called upon to learn to talk, read and write a language whose cultural context was so removed from theirs.

This remains a difficulty even with the now highly literate former colonial persons, when they have to learn a third or fourth language far removed from the contexts of both their culture and that of the former colonial master. The tendency is for the learner to pass through three grids – think out the problem in his cultural context, transfer it to that of the former colonial master, and finally to that of the language being studied.

The experience of the writer is a case in point. This applied at the time when he had to learn to speak, read and write Czech, in order that he pursued his studies in that language. Because he was learning Czech through English, he succeeded where others may not, in pushing his first language further away from his immediate cultural consciousness and thus attempted to allow the culture and language of the former colonial master to assume the first language position. In this way he had to engage major thought processes in English i.e. think in English. In short, that is the only time the writer remembers ever dreaming in English.

Undoubtedly, experiences such as these do underline the importance of one's mother tongue in literacy i.e. learning to read and write, as well as undertake simple computations in one's own language. This is a position supported by most, if not all educators and educational psychologists. In fact, one of the cardinal principles in pedagogy is to start from the level reached by the learners. Thus, where literacy is concerned, the starting point is obviously the language spoken i.e. the mother tongue. It is assumed that the learner will have a reasonable knowledge of it. Statistics on drop-outs, especially that relating to adult learners, do often point to the fact that the first literacy lessons are the most critical for adult learners who, as we all know, are always free to vote with their feet.

The writer's visit to literacy classes in Northern Botswana where Kalanga-speaking adult learners do literacy in Setswana, which is a second language to them, revealed a high drop-out level.[16] This was further revealed by a literacy evaluation survey undertaken by Mutanyata, Gaborone and Youngman, of the Institute of Adult Education, at the University of Botswana.[17]

This, and other empirical observations, serves to confirm the fact that teaching literacy in a language foreign to the learner means that, in addition to the difficulties involved in learning the mechanics of reading and writing, the learner is further faced with the difficulties inherent in the acquisition of the vocabulary and grammatical structures of that language.

Literacy teaching in a language foreign to the learner in terms of it not being the learner's first language, i.e. the mother tongue, involves the risk of the teacher or instructor being robbed of that

valuable learner participation. Further, the choice of the mother tongue for literacy reflects the need to link education with the preservation and re-inforcement of cultural identity. In fact, encouraging the use of mother tongue does not necessarily imply a desire to eliminate the foreign language in use, any more than it implies a desire to limit the mother tongue to an oral role. If anything, it goes a long way in diversifying and enriching that country's culture. Admittedly, the question of minority languages remains an extremely sensitive issue in those African countries that have enforced monolingualism.

However, some countries like Zambia and Zimbabwe with a number of languages, have adopted, in the main, bilingualism for most of the inhabitants whose languages have written transcripts. In this way the initial literacy teaching is provided in the mother tongue, followed by teaching of the official language as a second language. This compromise approach has both political and pedagogic advantages in so far as the acquisition of the mechanics of reading and writing in the mother tongue facilitates the transition to the learning of a second language.[18]

CONCLUSION

However, all said and done, the question of: "In which language should literacy instruction be offered?" is not an easy one. It is not easy for, in the newly independent countries of Africa which are still politically and economically unstable, the question of using the mother tongue in every sphere of political, social, economic and administrative activity is not to be taken lightly. It is perhaps one reason why soon after independence, even if that independence was achieved by means of a caesarean operation, the language of the former colonial master is not only retained, but preferred as the official language; the language of politics, administration, legal processes, industry, trade and commerce, as well as the medium of instruction in school, colleges and university. In this sense and consideration, it is important to stress the point that there are certain practical considerations that cannot be overlooked. That in selecting to emphasize the mother tongue for literacy instruction it is important to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages in pedagogic, financial, cultural, social and political terms. However, looked at purely in pedagogical and cultural terms, the importance of learning to read and write in one's mother tongue cannot be over-emphasized.

References

1. *Sponsors' Handbook*, Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe (ALOZ), Harare, March 1986, p.1.
2. Ibid, p.1. The pronoun "he" will appear to apply to both sexes.
3. According to UNESCO the rate of illiteracy throughout the world declined from 32.9 per cent in 1970 to 28.6 per cent in 1980. *Theory and Practice of Literacy Work, UNESCO, Paris*, 1984, p.8.
4. *Literacy and Literacy*, by Andre Lestage, Educational Studies and Documents No. 42, UNESCO, Paris, 1981, p.5.
5. *The Challenge of Illiteracy*, UNESCO, Paris, 1985, p.7.
6. ALOZ defined an adult "as a person who is fifteen years or older and is not in the formal school system". Sponsors' Handbook, op. cit, p.1.
7. *Theory and Practice of Literacy Work*, op. cit, p.1.
8. Ibid, p.3.
9. Ibid, p.3.
10. The Challenge of Illiteracy, op; p.1.
11. Ibid, p.1.
12. Burnett, Mary, *ABC of Literacy*, UNESCO, Paris, 1965, p.50.
13. Ibid, p.52.
14. Ibid, p.52.
15. Ibid, p.50. Burnett quoting Felix Walter.
16. The writer visited classes around Tutume in October 1985 as part of a student field supervision exercise.
17. This survey was undertaken by Dr. J. Mutanyata, Dr. S. Gaborone and Mr. F. Youngman in 1986, copies of which can be obtained from the IAE, University of Botswana.
18. *Theory and Practice of Literacy Work*, op-cit, p.140.

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